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Reauthorization of Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Act  
Floor Statement of U.S. Rep. Chris Smith  
September 29, 2010

Mr. Speaker, today the House will vote to reauthorize the Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Act, a law that I, along with Artur Davis, sponsored back in 2005.

That law created a new nationwide umbilical cord blood stem cell program designed to collect, derive, type and freeze cord blood units for transplantation into patients to mitigate and even cure serious disease, and pursuant to the law, also provided stem cells for research. The new cord blood program was combined in the 2005 law with an expanded bone marrow initiative crafted over several years by our distinguished colleague, Bill Young.

Since the program was enacted in 2005, 12 cord blood banks have received contracts with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Earlier this year HRSA reported that there were 27,493 cord blood units collected and another 13,000 plus units will be collected with the funds that have already been awarded.

The reauthorization before us authorizes \$23 million dollars to be appropriated for fiscal year 2011 through fiscal year 2014 and \$20 million for fiscal year 2015 for the National Cord Blood inventory, and also authorizes \$30 million to be appropriated for fiscal years 2011 through '14 and \$33 million for fiscal year 2015 for the Bone Marrow Transplant program.

It also enhances studies, demonstration programs, and outreach projects related to cord blood donation and collection to include exploring innovative technologies, novel approaches, and expanding the number of collection sites. It also extends the term of initial and contract extensions from three to five years, making it easier for banks to engage in long-term relationship building with birthing hospitals. It'll also require the cord blood banks to establish a plan for increasing cord blood unit collections and/or to expand the number of collection sites with which they work and provide a plan for becoming self-sufficient.

Mr. Speaker, each year over 4 million babies are born in America. In the past, virtually every placenta and umbilical cord was tossed as medical waste. Today, doctors have turned this "medical waste" into medical miracles.

Not only has God in His wisdom and goodness created a placenta and the umbilical cord to nurture and protect the precious life of an unborn child, but now we know that another gift awaits us immediately after birth. Something very special is left behind, cord blood that is teeming with life-saving stem cells. Indeed, it remains one of the best kept secrets in America that umbilical cord blood stem cells and adult stem cells in general are curing people of a myriad of terrible conditions and diseases—over 70 diseases in adults, as well as in children.

Cord blood transplants are on the cutting edge of science for the treatment of leukemia. In June, researcher Dr. Mary Eapen of the Medical College of Wisconsin said that in treating leukemia in adult patients, cord blood is so flexible that it even worked when it was not an exact match. "What we found is when you look at the outcome of leukemia-free survival, which is the likelihood of a patient being alive without disease, it's the same whether you are transplanting using an adult graft which is from an adult donor or a cord blood unit." Very promising results are also being found in children with leukemia who undergo cord blood transplants, with 60 percent of patients alive and leukemia-free at 60 months.

In addition to treating blood cancers, clinical trials are underway for the treatment of many other cancers, such as breast and kidney and treating solid tumors. Human clinical trials show promise in treating Type I diabetes, cerebral palsy, metabolic storage diseases, brain injury and respiratory distress in newborns, spinal cord injury, and cartilage injuries. Cord blood stem cell transplants can cure sickle cell anemia, one of the most horrific diseases suffered by and affecting 1 out of every 500 African-Americans in America. The legislation that is before us thankfully has already cleared the Senate and will soon be down for the President's desk for signature. The legislation before us lays out many important goals and benchmarks so that more patients will be able to receive the treatments that they so desperately need.

Dr. Joanne Kurtzberg with Duke University Medical Center recently stated in a review of the success in cord blood transplantations, and I quote her, "Cord blood transplantation is now an established field with enormous potential. In the future, it may emerge as a source of cells for cellular therapies focused on tissue repair and regeneration."

This is a great bill. It is bipartisan, and it deserves the support of the entire body.